

*The Goodness of God as manifested to us, and his Severity to
other Nations, considered,*

I N A
S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D A T
W H I D F O R D in E S S E X,

O N
Friday the 14th of March, 1760.

B E I N G T H E
Day appointed for a P U B L I C K F A S T.

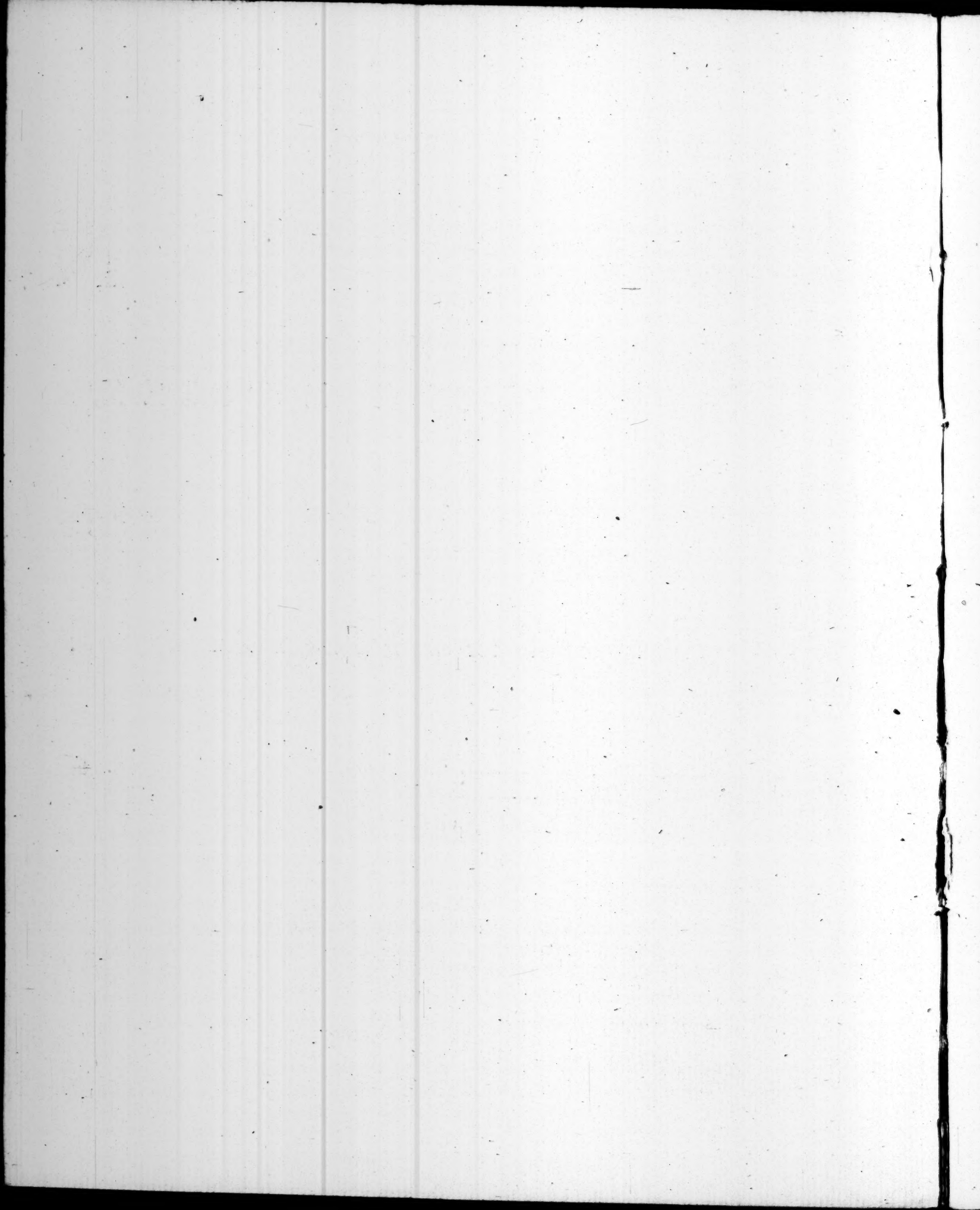
By J. S T E F F E,
Vicar of LITTLE BADDOW, in the same County.

————— Sæviôr Armis
Luxuria incubuit, victumque ulciscitur Orbem.
Juv. Sat. VI. v. 291, 292.

L O N D O N :

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ROM. xi. 22.

Behold therefore the Goodness, and Severity of God : on them which fell, Severity ; but towards thee, Goodness, if thou continue in that Goodness : otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

IN this very serious Admonition of the Apostle we are altogether as much concerned, as those were to whom it was written. For having seen and experienced the Goodness of God towards us, we also must continue in that Goodness by a virtuous use of it ; otherwise, instead of *Favour* we must expect *Severity* ; must expect that God will deal with us for our Perverseness and Folly, as he did with the stubborn and rebellious People referred to in our Text, *the Jews* ; who having wearied his great Patience by an intolerable Abuse of his Mercy, were at last cut off, not only from being his peculiar People, but from being a Nation at all.

Considering therefore the Admonition in our Text as equally belonging to us, let us *behold* on the one Hand the *Goodness*, on the other the *Severity of God*: *On them that fell, Severity*; *but towards Us, Goodness*, that by a serious Consideration of both, we may still be happy in his Favour and Protection.

The first View we are here directed to take, as it is a very pleasing one, so it will convince us, that the Goodness of God has been manifested to us in many great and valuable Instances.

First, and indeed principally, in making us to be his People; by bringing us from Heathen Darkness to the glorious Light of the Gospel of Christ, the *Day-spring from on high that has visited us*.—Also in making us a Protestant People, by recovering us from the gross Errors, Idolatries, and Superstitions of Popery, in the Darkness of which we had long sat.—Also in making us a free People, no less famed for our civil Liberties than for our religious Knowledge; no less happy in the wise and well-adjusted Government under which we live, and the equitable Laws by which we are governed and protected, than by the Purity of our Faith, the excellent Order and beautiful Simplicity of our publick Worship.

As by the Goodness and Mercy of God, we are a Christian, a Protestant, and a free People, so by the same Goodness we are made to be a very great and powerful People, divine Providence having often interposed in our Favour by giving Wisdom to our Counsels, Victory to our Fleets and Armies.

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The British History, in every Age of it, shines with the Triumphs of our Ancestors, and the many Deliverances God has wrought for us. *We have heard with our Ears, and our Fathers have declared unto us, the noble Works God did in their Days, and in the old Time before them.* We have also seen in *our Days* his *noble Works*, how with a mighty Hand he has scattered our Enemies before us, crowning us with Glory, while he has covered them with Shame and Disgrace.

The Victories and Triumphs, the Laurels and Trophies of Honour, we have lately obtained, are so universally known, that to mention them on this Occasion would be altogether needless. Those especially which have happened within the Compass of the last year. So great indeed as well as numerous have these been, that as a wise, powerful, and warlike People, our Reputation perhaps never was higher, nor the Name of an Englishman either more respectable in the World, or more terrible to our Enemies. For in what other Age have we shewed more undaunted Courage, fought more desperate Battles, gained more signal Victories, not by sea only, but by Land; in the East, the West, the South, and indeed in almost all Parts of the Earth.

As divine Providence never blessed us with greater Success abroad, so never did we enjoy more Peace and Security at home, not only from the horrid Confusions and Devastations of a foreign Invasion, with which we have been so often threatened, but from Strife and Contention among ourselves; insomuch that as we never were more courageous, never more victorious than now, so never were we known to be more unanimous; never was there a more universal Zeal among us, for carrying on the

the war with Vigour, never more Chearfulness in bearing the Expences of it, never more Affection shewed to our most excellent and gracious Sovereign, (whom God preserve) nor more Confidence in his paternal Wisdom, and Care, or in the Wisdom and Care, the Spirit and Resolution of those great Men, who directing our Councils, and presiding over our Fleets and Armies, have so often led us on to Conquest and Glory. — And then, to this great Blessing, Peace, — internal Peace, God of his Mercy has added Plenty, having given to the Earth, Fruitfulness and Increase, and thereby *filled us with the finest of the Wheat, as well as made Peace within our Borders.*

And now, having dealt thus kindly by us in making so much of his Goodness *to pass before us*; the next Thing to be considered is, how we ought to deal by him, so as to *continue in his Goodness*, and secure to ourselves the great Blessings we enjoy. And

First, as we should bear in Mind a thankful Sense of that Goodness to which we are so much indebted, and from which as from an exuberant and inexhaustible Fountain all our Happiness flow, so we should humbly and devoutly own our Dependance upon him for future Good. In doing this we are warranted not only by the Directions of his holy Word, though that were Warrant enough, but also by the common Practice of Mankind, the Belief of a divine Interposition, especially in Matters of War, having I think, prevailed in all Ages of the World, and perhaps among all Nations.

• Various have been the Methods, in which this Notion has expressed itself, and the Degrees to which it has been carried. HOMER's Gods are represented

represented as actually coming down from Heaven, and personally engaging in those Battles he describes, or sending their favourite Captains and Heroes celestial Armour. Agreeably to this poetical, and indeed to the more general Notion of a divine Interposition, the *Greeks*, and after them the *Romans*, as also the ancient *Persians*, seldom engaged in War, till they had first consulted the Will of these supposed Deities by Divination, and fought their Favour and Protection by Sacrifices and Prayers.

But besides having Recourse to Prayers, Sacrifices, Divinations, and the like Methods of Piety, when going to War, it was also usual with them to give their Soldiers the *Tessera*, as it was called, just before the Battle began. This was some Word, or Sentence, designed as a Signal of Attack, and which, while it led them to hope for Victory, led them also to ascribe Victory, when obtained, to the Aid of some divine Power. Such were those of CYRUS. — JUPITER (*a*) is *our Leader and Ally*. — JUPITER (*b*) *our Captain and Preserver*.

The *Tessera* being given out by the General, it was from him founded through the whole Army. After which they advanced to Battle, singing as they usually did, the Praises of some Deity or Hero. Thus amongst the ancient *Persians*, after the *Tessera* had gone round, the *Pæan* began, or Hymn to CASTOR and POLLUX; as also among the
Normans,

(*a*) Δια συμμαχον και ηγημονα. Cyropæd. Lib. III.

(*b*) Δια σωτηρα και ηγημονα. Ib. Lib. VII.

Normans, (c) who sung the Praises of ROLLO. The Design of all these religious Customs was, partly to express their Dependance on a divine Power, and partly that by inspiring the Soldiers with a warlike Enthusiasm, arising from a Persuasion that some Hero or Deity was present with them, and fighting for them, they might, as XENOPHON observes, (d) be less afraid of their Enemies, as indeed they would.

Such was the Piety of the Ancients, in which they have been followed by some of the Moderns. CHARLES the XIIth of *Sweden* usually began his Battles with these Words, — “ *With the Assistance of God,*” which being sounded through his whole Army, the Attack began. Something of the same Kind seems to have been practised by our *Prussian* Hero, before the famous Battle of *Rosbach*, the Consequence of which was, that the Soldiers being inspired with a kind of religious Fury, rushed with irresistible Violence and Impetuosity upon their Enemies, and almost instantly broke and routed them.

Upon the whole, in seeking the Protection of almighty God, when we are going to War, and then ascribing to him those Advantages and Victories we obtain over our Enemies; we not only follow, as was said before, the Directions given us in his holy Word, but the common Practice of Mankind, and the Examples of those Nations and Heroes, who have ever been deemed the wisest and bravest.

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(c) To these we may add the *Jews*, as in that Instance of GIDEON, Judges vii. 18. *The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon.* And perhaps that of the Psalmist, three Times repeated Psal. cxviii. *In the Name of the Lord will I destroy them.*

(d) Cyropæd. Lib. III.

Why then should it be thought unfit, or unnecessary in us, humbly and thankfully to own with them, particularly with that great General and Conqueror, CYRUS — *That God is our Leader and Ally.* — *Our Captain and Preserver.* Or with the royal Psalmist, that he is our *Shield*, our *high Tower*, our *Rock of Defence.* — That He has won for us those Victories we have gained — Has raised us to that Height of Glory to which we have reached, and having made us what we are, a mighty and terrible People, can alone support us in this Character, and make us still the Dread, as well as Envy of our Enemies.

But while we are thus sensible of our Dependance upon almighty God for future Victories and Successes, and thus grateful to him for those we have already obtained, let us not weakly imagine this will alone secure his Favour and Protection. — To our Piety we must add Virtue, to our Prayers, Endeavours. At the same Time that we apply to him for Help, we must do what we can to help ourselves ; must fight for our Country valiantly, and from a real and undissembled Spirit of Patriotism, must be true to its Interests, preferring the publick, to our own private Good. We must also be sober, temperate, just ; — must practise the Duties of Humanity as well as Piety, exercise Compassion as well as Devotion, and show that we have not only *Faith towards God*, but Honour and *good Faith* towards Man. In short, must be in all Respects Good — Good to one another, and to all Mankind.

If we thus *continue in the Goodness of God*, by making so worthy an Use of it, then may we reasonably hope, still to continue a mighty and prosperous Nation, abounding as we do at this Time, in Wealth, Glory,

and Peace.—But if degenerating from our ancient Piety and Virtue, we grow profane and immoral, grow luxurious and intemperate, venal and perfidious, —— if preferring private Good to that of the Publick, we aim at nothing but to indulge ourselves in Indolence and Pleasure, and as a Consequence of this unhappy and depraved Turn, grow soft and effeminate, what can we reasonably expect, but to be forsaken of God, and by him cast down from that Height of Greatness and Power, to which he has raised us.

For though to the virtuous and obedient he is infinitely gracious and merciful, yet to those who abuse his Goodness, and trifle with his Patience, he can be terribly severe: Witness the many and great Examples of powerful Cities, Kingdoms and Empires, which by his just Displeasure have been overthrown and destroyed. As therefore we have taken a View of the *Goodness of God* to us who *stand*, and considered what Use we are to make of that, let us now, on the other Hand, *behold his Severity on them that fell*, that from their Fate we may learn what ours must be, if our Deserts are the same.

What then became of the unhappy People, of whom the Apostle is speaking in our Text, the *Jews*? Were they not cut off? And was it not for their Wickedness? Why were *Sodom and Gomorrah* destroyed? *Because their Cry was great, and their Sin very grievous*. Gen. xviii. 20. But passing by these, and many other Instances of the divine *Severity*, that might be mentioned, let us observe what befel the four *great Monarchies*, as they are justly called, they having been the greatest, and most considerable that ever were in the World; I mean, the *Assyrian*, the *Persian*,
the

the *Grecian*, the *Roman* ; with Respect to which, we may observe in general, that rising one after another to an amazing Height of Power and Greatness, they also fell one after another into total and absolute Destruction, being cast down by their Vices from that Glory and Magnificence, to which their Virtues had raised them. But let us view them a little more particularly.

Nineveh being destroyed, *Babylon* became the chief Seat of the *Assyrian* Empire, the first of the four ; and growing, like *Nineveh*, very corrupt and wicked, God, to punish it, stirred up the *Medes* and *Persians* against it, who, after long pressing it with a Siege, took it. Wickedness was not only the remote and general, but the immediate and particular Cause of the Destruction of this great City. For there happening to be a publick Festival during the Siege, the People of *Babylon* gave themselves up so entirely to their wonted Riot and Luxury, that they forgot to secure the Gates of the City that crossed the River. This being observed by the *Persians*, they rushed in upon them, and having easily cut their Way through the drunken few Soldiers that opposed them, marched directly to the Palace, where the King, with his Princes, Wives and Concubines, was drinking Wine out of the sacred Vessels, which NEBUCHADNEZZAR his Father had carried away from the Temple at *Jerusalem* ; therein affronting God, by applying to a profane and riotous Use, what had been set apart to his Service.

This was the BELSHAZZAR we read of in DANIEL, who by a Hand-writing on the Wall was told, that his Kingdom *should be given to the Medes and Persians* (e), which accordingly it was that very Night, the

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King,

(e) Dan. v. 28.

King, and most of his Attendants, being slain soon after the Hand-writing appeared.

And now the *Persians*, having taken this vast City, and subdued the prodigious Empire to which it belonged, became Masters of the World: Nor was there ever a more virtuous People than they, nor a Prince more justly beloved and honoured, than CYRUS their General, by whom the City was taken. History gives us a most amiable Account of his Clemency, Justice, Temperance, Valour, and Piety. This indeed was the Character of the whole Nation of the *Persians* at this Time. But having conquered the luxurious and effeminate *Affyrians*, they fell in with their corrupt Manners, and from being a hardy and temperate People, grew soft and delicate, and were ripening apace for Destruction.

In the mean Time there was a little Nation rising up in the World, no less famous for its Virtues than the *Persians* had been; nor less so for its Battles and Victories: I mean the *Greeks*, who, waxing great, drew upon themselves the Envy and Jealousy of the *Persians*, who, at last, were resolved to subdue them. In order to this,

So vast an Army was gathered together, that the Earth, as it were, groaned under the Weight of it, and Rivers, over which it marched, are said to have been drank up by it. It was the greatest Force we read of any where, or perhaps that ever took the Field; and yet it was raised to subdue only a Handful of Men in Comparison. But this Handful of Men were virtuous; were brave; were mighty Lovers of Liberty and their Country, and had been taught never to turn their Backs upon an Enemy, though its Superiority

periority of Numbers were ever so great, but rather to fall gloriously on the Field of Battle.

Agreeably to this Maxim, they boldly faced the prodigious Army of the *Persians* raised to subdue them, and by their amazing Valour, aided, no doubt, by that Power which always favours and protects the Virtuous, routed and destroyed it. Not long after this, they overthrew the whole *Persian* Empire. — And now being Masters of the World, they, like its former Masters, by imitating the corrupt Manners of those whom they had conquered and subdued, grew soft, voluptuous, effeminate, and in Time losing their ancient Piety and Virtue, lost their Valour, and, together with that, the Favour and Protection of almighty God.

While the *Greeks* were sinking in Luxury and effeminate Softness, the *Romans*, another small People, by the Force of their Virtues, and the Favour of divine Providence, were growing great and powerful. To them, therefore, at last, the *Greeks* fell a Sacrifice, as the *Persians* had done to the *Greeks*, and the *Assyrians* to them.—And now the World having once more changed its Masters, these, like the rest, changed their Manners, and in Time met the same Fate. In short, the *Romans*, having by their horrible Corruptions, their Pride, Luxury, and Impiety, drawn upon themselves the Displeasure of God, were invaded by the *Goths*, *Vandals*, *Ostrogoths*, *Visigoths*, and I know not how many other Sorts of wild and savage People, who, pouring upon them like a Deluge from the North, overwhelmed and destroyed them.

Such was the Fate of these great and mighty Empires, which from spreading themselves over the greatest Part of the known World, came to
nothing.

nothing (*f*). For as Virtue had raised them high in the Favour of God, and made them great and powerful, so Vice cast them down and destroyed them: And the same Effect will ever follow from the same Cause.

If then we would continue to be the great and prosperous People we are, we must continue TO BE VIRTUOUS; otherwise our Greatness will by no Means protect us. For are we mightier than those powerful Nations mentioned above, or more renowned for our Triumphs and Victories than they once were? I believe not.—Do we then think, that God will overlook our Wickedness for the Sake of our Profession, and save us from deserved Destruction, because, as Christians and Protestants, we are his People? I am afraid not. For were not the *Jews* his People? Yet when they sinned, did not he punish them? And though he bore with them a long while, and perhaps the longer for being his People, yet, did he not at last utterly destroy them as a Nation, scattering them abroad upon the Face of the whole Earth, and making them, as they are to this Day, *Fugitives* and *Vagabonds*. Let us then fear the just Displeasure and Severity of God; and not promise ourselves the Continuance of national Prosperity, on any other Ground than national Virtue.

I would not only charitably hope, but I really believe, that we have still as much of this left, as any other Nation in the World. God grant that we may continue in the Possession of it. May we still be brave and honest; still shew good Faith to the Nations round about us; still be the Asserters and Defenders of publick Liberty and Religion; still the Scourge of Tyranny and lawless Power; still be courageous in subduing
our

(*f*) Excepting the *Persians*, who are, though fallen greatly from their ancient Power and Glory, a People to this Day.

our Enemies ; still merciful to them when subdued ; thus shewing, that we are actuated, not by a pusillanimous Spirit of Revenge, which is always cruel and bloody, but by a just and manly Resentment ; which, as it arises from a due Sense of our own, and the natural Rights of Mankind, will, after these Rights are properly secured, by humbling the Pride, and breaking the unrighteous Power of those who invade them, drop of its own Accord, and give Way to the equally generous and heroic Workings of Pity and Humanity.

To these great Virtues, let us add Temperance and Sobriety, cultivating at the same Time, and with the greatest Attention and Care, that Harmony and good Agreement one with another, by Means of which we are so happy in ourselves, as well as so formidable to our Enemies. And let us crown all our Virtues with sincere and undissembled Piety to almighty God. — With Gratitude and Thankfulness to him for his past Mercies, and a humble Sense of our Dependance upon him for future Safety and Happiness. — Thus virtuous, and thus religious may we be ; that so we may secure to ourselves the Favour of God, and be preserved from that Ruin and Destruction, into which so many Kingdoms, and Cities, and Nations, once renowned for Wealth and Power, have fallen ; and into which we ourselves, great as we are, must expect some Time or other to fall, if by our Vices and Impieties we provoke the divine Displeasure. — *Behold then, O Britain, the Goodness and Severity of God : on them that fell, Severity ; but towards thee Goodness, if thou continue in that Goodness : otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.*

F I N I S.

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